

**Book review: John M. Hagedorn (ed.), Gangs in the Global City: Alternatives to Traditional Criminology**

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## BOOK REVIEW

**John M Hagedorn (ed.),**

*Gangs in the Global City: Alternatives to Traditional Criminology*, University of Illinois

**Press: Urbana, 2007; 320 pp.: ISBN 9780252073373, US\$28.00**

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This volume focuses on reframing gangs beyond the criminology literature. John M Hagedorn assumes that the key to understanding their activities at the beginning of the 21st century is an interdisciplinary approach. This means expanding the analysis of gangs in relation to selected aspects of globalization such as the redivision of space, strengthening of traditional identities, ghettoization, social exclusion, socialization to crime, youth violence, and the underground economy. This approach is intended to move away from the theoretical trap of old paradigms that are useful for law enforcement, but are not useful for understanding the complexity of gangs in accordance with concepts of late modernity. The book includes chapters by scholars whose research is not focused only on gangs - professors of sociology, psychology, and anthropology from the United States, United Kingdom, Mexico, Australia, and Germany.

In the introductory chapter, Hagedorn proposes three areas of research that differentiate this volume from traditional criminology: (1) institutionalized gangs in ghettos, neighborhoods, and *favelas*; contemporary gangs are not only temporary adolescent activity; (2) gangs that are found not only in 'American form' but all over the world in response to the changing spaces of globalizing cities; and (3) gangs as 'social actors' whose identities are formed by ethnic, racial, and/or religious oppression, and/or by participation in the underground economy and by constructions of gender. These areas are discussed in theoretical and case studies focused more on macro- and meso-level processes in cities than on a general analysis of gang prevalence, forms, behavior, group processes, or organized crime.

The book consists of 13 contributed chapters divided into five sections. These sections are not supplemented by short summaries of the chapters. The first section tries to build theoretical perspectives for studies on gangs that are not connected to traditional criminology. Hagedorn, in his chapter ('Gangs, institutions, race, and space: The Chicago School revisited'), proposes a new ecological paradigm due to such changes as agglomeration, informalization, gentrification, and social exclusion. The author shows that gangs are organizations of the socially excluded that have been institutionalized in global cities - they can play important

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economic, political, or military roles as part of the internal logic of the structure of the postindustrial underground economy. Loic JD Wacquant ('Three pernicious premises in the study of the American ghetto') shows how processes of stereotyping, ghettoization, social exclusion, and urban poverty are obstacles to accurate analysis of the ghetto as normal social worlds. He claims that researchers should forsake the disorganization and exoticism of gang paradigms. Jock Young ('Globalization and social exclusion: The sociology of vindictiveness and the criminology of transgression') encourages us to go beyond social exclusion and inclusion paradigms to concepts such as 'dual city' and 'bulimic society' that are more focused on crossing the borders between 'winners' and 'losers.'

The second section describes spaces of globalization. Saskia Sassen ('The global city: One setting for new types of gang work and political culture?') points out that social researchers still need more data to promote the thesis that gangs are transformed by globalization. It is important to look more closely at new employment regimes in postindustrial cities, informal economies, and transnational circuits connecting cities across borders. Cameron Hazlehurst ('Observing New Zealand "gangs," 1950-2000: Learning from a small country') describes how gangs form their national identity, services, and scope as self-sustaining communities as well as causalities of a free-market economy and political, juridical, legal, and law enforcement environments. Jan Rus and Diego Vigil ('Rapid urbanization, migrant indigenous youth, and gangs: The case of San Cristóbal, Chiapas, Mexico') discuss how rural migration by Mayas to the city of San Cristóbal was connected to the development of youth gangs that divided the city into those in Spanish or Mayan traditions.

The third section focuses on identities of resistance. Joan W Moore ('Female gangs: Gender and globalization') looks at how gender construction is connected to new studies on gangs. The emergence of female gangs can be explained by the peripheralization of labor, gender identity crises, and immigration of young women to developed countries, which force them to change their roles in order to work with males. Moore proposes a more complex differentiation of women's groups connected to gangs. In 'Youth groupings, identity, and the political context: On the significance of extremist youth groupings in unified Germany,' Joachim Kersten describes how gangs can develop during political and economic transitions. He points out that the image of Nazi skinheads and their identity are used as a reminder of Germany's atrocious past, although in fact the contemporary groups may not be easily and/or closely allied to right-wing organizations. Moreover, they may not represent the whole nation. Luis Barrios ('Gangs and spirituality of liberation') shows how the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation

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(ALKQN) - a major gang in New York City - is trying to transform itself by changing its collective identity and form of defense against the dominant culture.

The fourth section deals with the issue of gangs as a response to neoliberalism. David Brotherton shows further possibilities of changing the ALKQN in 'Toward the gang as a social movement.' He also describes the differences between gangs and 'street organizations' with empowerment models that may be useful for other researchers. John Pitts ('Americanisation, the third way, and the racialisation of youth crime and disorder') shows how government activities and the approach to crime changed at the end of the 20th century. The racialization of youth crime and social disorder is a major shift from an earlier policy on multiculturalism and social democracy.

The final section contains a conclusion by Hagedorn ('Gangs in late modernity') and a review by James F Short, Jr ('The challenges of gangs in global contexts'). Those chapters serve as a stimulus to the discussion and show further research directions. The editor of the volume concludes with a definition of gangs and their typology. He also describes the most common elements of gangs to consist of racialized or ethnic identity, social exclusion, and involvement in the informal economy. James Short suggests further studies on linking globalization and gangs. He shows that defining relations of those concepts will be a challenge, and that data and evidence on the new roles of gangs are still needed.

The book provides a broad perspective on contemporary gangs. It supplements its analysis with discussions of the varieties of capitalism as well as welfare states models. The different types of informal economies in which gangs are involved are also discussed. More attention should have been paid to information and communications technologies (e.g., social networking services) used by gangs. Also, a chapter on the variety of social policy strategies in global cities towards gangs would have been interesting. It could expand the analysis of new social risks and gang relations in late modernity.

This volume is a pioneering work on gangs and should be of particular interest to educators and researchers, and practitioners interested in youth, informal economy, social work, and urban planning.